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SUBJECT: ANGOLAN NGO GIVES REGISTRATION PROCESS HIGH MARKS

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11. (U) Summary: The Angolan Electoral Platform, a group of civil society election observers, gave the voter registration process high marks when it publicly announced results of its months long monitoring observations. Observers were routinely accorded access to registration centers; found that voters understood the process; the actual registration was conducted efficiently even utilizing personal witnesses in absence of documentation; and found political party monitors present in almost all registration stations. Glitches noted were mostly related to technical difficulties or the failure to produce required documentation. GRA officials have been very receptive to the Electoral Platform's findings and are examining ways to work with it as the process continues. Embassy Luanda commends the National Democratic Institute on its capacity building with the Electoral Platform in electoral process and monitoring training for its members. End Summary.

12. (U) Background: The Electoral Platform, an umbrella organization for election-related civil society organizations in Angola, collected data from its election observers between the start of voter registration on November 15, 2006, through March 30, 2007. The Platform utilized 169 observers to cover registration stations in 42 municipalities in 11 different provinces. Each observation period lasted a minimum of one hour, after which the observer completed a standard form and submitted it to their local civil society organization. The observation statistics detailed below are based on 2780 documented observations at 280 registration stations. The Platform receives funding, training, and technical assistance from the National Democratic Institute (NDI), a USAID implementing partner. End Background.

The Big Picture

13. (U) Overall the voter registration stations were ranked "good" or "very good" in 86.6 percent of the site visits. Only 0.8 percent received a ranking of "very poor." The Platform also stated that 72.3 percent of observed voters had a good understanding of the registration process. Overall, 44 percent of those registered were women, with 54.9 percent in rural areas. However, in February only 31 percent of observed registrations were for women. The GRA's efforts during Marco Mulher (reftel) raised that number to 38 percent. Almost 27 percent of registration officials and 34 percent of the election observers were women.

14. (U) In most cases, observers were given access to registration stations and allowed to freely observe the registration process. The median registration time for the 147,043 observed registrations was eight minutes per person, or a rate of 30 people per hour. A police presence was noted in 85 percent of the total site visits, but the percentage was notably higher in rural areas, at 91.3 percent.

Political party election monitors were also present during 99 percent of the site visits and between four and nine monitors were present during 60 percent of the visits. Per Angolan law, undocumented eligible voters can use known witnesses, generally clergy or local leaders, to verify citizenship. This was important in rural areas, where witness testimony was used in 59.2 percent of cases, vs. only 16.6 percent in urban areas.

Glitches and Hitches

15. (U) Only 8.4 percent of the total site visits noted delays in the registration process, but in the rural border provinces of Zaire (north) and Kwando Kubango (south) over 20 percent of cases had noted delays. Delays were generally caused when registration officials questioned identification documents or when political party monitors either didn't have or refused to present their credentials. Technical problems were also an issue; in 15 percent of site visits observers noted interruptions in work due to technical problems.

Recommendations and Results

16. (U) The Platform presented in findings at a press conference and recommended that the GRA implement SADC standards for elections in order to strengthen the electoral process and increase transparency. It reminded electoral officials to follow the Code of Conduct outlined by the National Electoral Commission and to encourage women to register and work for registration stations. It also encouraged political parties to provide more training for their party monitors on the electoral laws and process, as the report classified such knowledge as "weak" during many site visits. The Platform asked all civil society and church

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organizations to continue their civil education projects, and asked donors to support the efforts of Angolan civil society to stabilize democratic institutions and ensure free and fair elections.

17. (SBU) After the results were released, the Director of the Inter-Ministerial Commission for the Electoral Process (CIPE) Virgilio de Fontes Pereira called Platform leaders in to discuss the press conference and observation results. Platform Director Mathias Capapelo told Poloff that Pereira was pleased by the positive contribution that civil society had made and asked for more data as it becomes available. The two also discussed challenges faced by the Platform, namely the lack of funding and resources, and ways in which the GRA may be able to partner with and support the Platform's efforts. No funding or support commitments were made at the meeting, and discussions continue.

18. (SBU) Comment: While the Platform's organized study of the registration process is a landmark for the development of Angolan civil society, a lack of capacity and funding is limiting its effectiveness and growth. Of the 381 stations open during this observation period, observers were only able to reach 280. The vast majority of these were in urban areas, as observers lack the logistical resources to reach rural areas. For example, in Huila Province, observers only reached six of fourteen municipalities and the majority of site visits were made in the Provincial capital of Lubango. Capapelo and the Platform now must determine if possible government funding, which would allow the group greater reach if it were made available, will jeopardize its independence and impartiality. Embassy also notes that NDI has provided excellent capacity building to the Platform in training its monitors, and developing its ability to carry out this type of data compilation. End Comment.

FERNANDEZ